

KEY INDICATORS OF PROGRESS TOWARD POSTSECONDARY REFORM

ACTION
Agenda Item D-2
March 19, 2001

Recommendation

- The staff recommends that the council approve the key indicators outlined in Attachment A to answer the five questions guiding postsecondary reform. These indicators will tell us whether Kentucky's system of postsecondary education is helping to improve the lives of Kentucky's people, the quality of the communities in which they live and work, and the economic well-being of the state.
- For the indicators included in Attachment B, the staff recommends that the council approve goals for 2002.
- The staff recommends that the council direct the staff to continue its work with the institutions and other agencies to propose the remaining goals by the end of 2001 according to the schedule outlined in Attachment C.

Background

The governor and General Assembly have judged that improving the quality of postsecondary education and increasing access to it will result in per capita income and standard of living at or above the national average by 2020. This means better jobs, higher incomes, better public schools, healthier children, and more stable families. In keeping with this judgment, state policymakers passed legislation in 1997 that set postsecondary education reform in motion.

As one of its first major acts, the council developed *2020 Vision: An Agenda for Kentucky Postsecondary Education*, which charts the course for reform. This plan focuses on how our efforts can make life better for the people of Kentucky. It focuses on those whom we serve.

The key indicators of progress toward postsecondary reform reflect the long-term goals of the effort. By focusing on the people of Kentucky—as students, parents, and workers—they offer a perspective that helps us view ourselves as providers of a public service and our work as a means to an end.

Answering Five Questions

One year ago, the council endorsed a set of five questions as the framework for developing a brief set of performance indicators:

- Are more Kentuckians ready for postsecondary education?
- Are more students enrolling?
- Are more students advancing through the system?
- Are we preparing Kentuckians for life and work?
- Are Kentucky's communities and economy benefiting?

The indicators listed in Attachment A will provide the answers. There are, of course, other possible measures. But settling on a short, selective list—8 to 10 for each question—will help the council focus its time, attention, and resources on what matters most at these early stages of reform. What we measure is what will matter.

The proposed measures should prompt systemwide change and improvement in the following ways:

Question 1: Are more Kentuckians ready for postsecondary education? Too many Kentuckians are not prepared to take full advantage of postsecondary education. Too few high school students are ready for postsecondary education when they graduate and too many do not graduate. We answer this question by looking at these two groups of people—the adult population in general and recent high school graduates in particular.

First, we want smaller percentages of Kentucky's adults functioning at low levels of literacy and with less than a high school diploma or GED. (Note: Our adult education initiative has its own set of five critical questions and performance indicators for each. Here, we pose only indicators that deal specifically with preparation for postsecondary education.)

Second, we want more students to take courses in high school that prepare them for advanced education, and we want increased performance on tests that predict how well students will do when they reach college.

Question 2: Are more students enrolling? Too few Kentuckians have advanced education beyond high school. We propose increasing the number of students enrolling in our colleges and universities, the percentage of the adult population enrolled, and the rates at which high school graduates and GED completers go on to postsecondary education.

Including GED completers is new for Kentucky and recognizes the importance of adult education in meeting postsecondary goals. Two additional measures underscore the role of the Kentucky Virtual University in contributing to enrollment and college-going rates.

In 1999, the council first established enrollment goals through the *Action Agenda, 1999-2004*. We shall update these projections over the course of the next few months.

Question 3: Are more students advancing through the system? Too many students leave college without earning a credential or acquiring a marketable skill. And Kentucky ranks 42nd in the percentage

of the population with a bachelor's degree. Under Question 3, we propose two types of indicators: 1) persistence, which tells us the extent to which students stay in college, earn certificates and diplomas, and transfer into advanced programs, and 2) graduation, which tells us whether they are completing baccalaureate programs and the timeliness with which they do so.

Regarding retention (freshmen still enrolled a year later), for the first time we propose tracking freshmen regardless of where they go. A new systemwide retention rate will show how many first-time students were still enrolled a year later—either at the same institution or at another in Kentucky, public or independent.

Question 4: Are we preparing Kentuckians for life and work? Too little is known about what students know and are able to do as a result of their college experiences. America's postsecondary education systems are made up of diverse institutions. There is no national curriculum and no good test that measures learning and allows comparisons from state to state (or even institution to institution).

We can know whether students are actively engaged in their college experience (a good predictor of learning) and the extent to which alumni think that their collegiate experiences prepared them for good jobs and satisfying lives. We will conduct surveys beginning in 2001.

We continue to have a placeholder in the key indicator system for foundational skills. In November, the staff reported that a number of states are interested in developing a test to measure reading, writing, mathematics, critical thinking, and problem solving. In the meantime, we propose to use the results from the satisfaction surveys and the National Survey of Student Engagement (see Agenda Item E) as proxy measures of student learning and preparation for life and work.

Question 4 also includes a key indicator addressing the preparation of teachers. House Bill 1 states that "...contributions to the quality of elementary and secondary education shall be a central responsibility of Kentucky's postsecondary institutions." The council staff has been working with the Education Professional Standards Board to establish the best measure for the council to use to measure the quality of teacher preparation and development. EPSB is the state agency responsible for working with the institutions on a national report card on teacher preparation sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The council's measures and goals will be consistent with this effort.

All of the indicators under Question 4 are being developed, and the staff will bring specific measures and goals to the council later in the year. As discussed at both the March and November 2000 council study sessions, we will report selected test scores for licensure, certification, and graduate school admissions exams as additional information about student competence.

Question 5: Are Kentucky's communities and economy benefiting? Kentucky needs better jobs and a workforce with the knowledge and skills to fill them. Otherwise, the House Bill 1 goals of higher per capita income and improved standard of living will not be met. Kentucky needs to create, attract, and sustain industries that thrive on new ideas and technologies.

Three types of measures will help gauge our success: the employment of graduates, the satisfaction of communities and employers with those graduates (and with other services provided by the colleges and universities), and the research and development efforts of the universities. We will conduct a community and employer survey this year and will establish goals once baseline data are known.

Goal setting for research and development indicators is being coordinated with the work of the Kentucky Innovation Commission and the commissioner of the new economy. The staff will present proposed goals for council consideration in May or July.

Setting Goals

The first of the six goals in House Bill 1 states that by 2020 Kentucky should have “a seamless, integrated system of postsecondary education strategically planned and adequately funded to enhance economic development and quality of life.” The proposed key indicators and goals were designed to help create this seamless system. As such, the majority of them are measured at the systemwide level. College going, educational attainment, and high school course taking cannot be broken down by institution. The indicators that set institutional goals do so to encourage changes on the campuses directed toward systemwide goals.

The council staff is proposing 2002 goals at the March meeting for about half of the systemwide indicators. Other goals will be presented later in 2001. Institutional goals for enrollment, retention, and graduation rates, initially set in the Action Agenda in 1999, will be renegotiated this spring so that objectives can be used in the budget development process. Other goals, including those under Questions 4 and 5, involve surveys or close coordination with other state agencies. Attachment A includes a goal-setting date for each indicator.

Coordinating with Others

As we developed performance indicators and goals throughout 2000, the council staff sought advice from the postsecondary community and from individuals and groups it serves. The staff consulted regularly with the presidents, chief academic officers, institutional research staffs, and faculty leaders. Externally, the staff sought advice from the Kentucky Department of Education, Workforce Development Cabinet, Education Professional Standards Board, Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center, Department for Employment Services, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, Association of Independent Kentucky Colleges and Universities, governor’s staff, legislative staff, Kentucky Educational Television, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, AFL/CIO and other labor groups, Kentucky League of Cities, Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, and Kentucky Advocates for Higher Education.

Where the council’s work overlaps with that of other agencies, the staff attempted to coordinate to the greatest extent possible. Question 1 is a good example. Since last fall, the council staff has worked closely with the staff of the Kentucky Department of Education about these indicators (and a few others under Questions 2 and 4). The council discussed its key indicators at the February 2001 joint meeting

with the Kentucky Board of Education. That board is developing its strategic plan and performance indicators this winter and spring. Although it appears that the council's goals and state board's preliminary ones are congruent, the council may need to refine its goals once the state board has completed its work.

Similarly, indicators under Question 5 should be compatible with the work of the newly formed Kentucky Innovation Commission, and those relating to teacher quality should fit with the work of the Education Professional Standards Board.

Unlike any other initiative in the reform to date, the development of these key indicators makes clear that postsecondary education is central to a host of other state initiatives. Exploring these connections gives the council the opportunity to understand shared goals and to create partnerships as we attempt to achieve them.

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